

Shalom, shalom Haverim!

"Freedom and the 'Do-ability' of the Torah"

In the book of Deuteronomy, in parashah Nitzavim, Moshe is 120 years old and about to lie down with his forefathers. Once again and for the final time, Moshe instructs His people to follow the ways of HaShem – to hear and obey His commandments. In one vein, Moshe instructs the people to “*choose life*” (Deut. 30:19) and yet, knowing the heart of his people all these years, their stubbornness and rebellious ways, he knows that they are prone to fall away in spite of themselves. G-d Himself, in His infinite foreknowledge confirms this: “*ADONAI said to Moshe, "You are about to sleep with your ancestors. But this people will get up and offer themselves as prostitutes to the foreign gods of the land where they are going. When they are with those gods, they will abandon Me and break My covenant which I have made with them"*” (Deut 31:16 CJB).

G-d knew in advance that they would fall. He also knew in advance that they would be restored:

“When the time arrives that all these things have come upon you, both the blessing and the curse which I have presented to you; and you are there among the nations to which ADONAI your God has driven you; then, at last, you will start thinking about what has happened to you; and you will return to ADONAI your God and pay attention to what He has said, which will be exactly what I am ordering you to do today - you and your children, with all your heart and all your being. At that point, ADONAI your God will reverse your exile and show you mercy; He will return and gather you from all the peoples to which ADONAI your God scattered you. If one of yours was scattered to the far end of the sky, ADONAI your God will gather you even from there; He will go there and get you.” (Deut 30:1-4 ff. CJB)

Many people today are turning back to Torah as their relationship with Yeshua develops. In the apostolic writings, Yochanan said that loving G-d means obeying His commandments which are not burdensome (1 John 5:3). Many believers are finding the ancient paths to be essential in knowing G-d and following Yeshua. Restoration has begun but it is far from complete. The complete restoration of the people to Israel will be in the future and will be of Messianic proportions – supernatural in scope. And this restoration is not just to the physical Land of Israel, it will also involve a restoration to the ways of the Master! At that time, all will turn back to HaShem in sincerity and Truth and follow His ways.

Back in the day – back when I attended Bible College, I was taught that we are “set free from the Law.” I was taught that we are no longer *under the Law* and that the commandments only serve to “lead us to Christ.” I was taught that the Law was given as a schoolmaster to show how utterly incapable we are in keeping it. I was taught that love and the Holy Spirit would lead and guide into all Truth and that the Law – only necessary for the Jews, has now been superseded by the New Testament.

For that reason, I received “freedom in Christ” with gladness! “After all,” I reasoned, “Freedom with restrictions is no freedom at all” and “grace with anything attached is no longer grace.”

Consequently, any religious expressions I had were conveniently massaged to fit my own lifestyle. Such was the nature of my early commitment to “Jesus.”

In addition to this I was also taught that “Grace” and “Law” are incompatible terms when it comes to G-d’s deliverance and salvation:

“For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ” (John 1:16-17 NASB).

This wonderful Scripture is often viewed as the presentation of two diametrically opposed alternatives or dispensations – the dispensation of “law” contrasted with the dispensation of “grace” – oil and water. This very traditional theology alleges that the dispensation of Law was predicated upon man’s ability to do and to keep, whereas the dispensation of grace is now predicated upon G-d’s grace alone. This kind of teaching radically misses the inherent value of living out G-d’s commandments as a way of life. Therefore, I have nothing positive to say about this teaching because “Law verses grace” is blatantly and categorically false – it is a false teaching. G-d’s grace is clearly seen in every book of the Bible. Moreover, so is God’s Law. One cannot be separated from the other because law and grace both represent the character and nature of our Heavenly Father. G-d’s Law can (and often was) abused into a system of legalism but it was never intended to function this way (Romans 3:31; 7:12; 1 Timothy 1:8).

Therefore, even though the “*Law was given through Moses,*” it was given to Moses directly from the mouth of G-d – He is the divine author. Prior to Sinai, HaShem heard the cries of His people and delivered them from Egyptian bondage, not to put them into another sort of bondage through inconceivable rules and regulations, but to show them how to be a holy people – separated unto Him.

The Law (I prefer the Hebrew word “Torah” which simply means “teaching” or “instruction”) is many things. It is the wedding covenant between G-d and His people and in a very real way, it also serves as the national constitution for the governance of Israel. Once again, in no way should the commandments be considered the inventions of Moshe (or anyone else). Rather, the commandments are not human but divine in nature and constitute instructions for living in holiness before G-d.

The Torah (Law) was never intended to function as a salvation document. HaShem gave the Torah to Moshe in order to set Israel apart as a unique people dedicated to Him – a light to the nations. The Torah is at the very center of G-d’s heart and He communicated these commandments in His Word as the way of life. They were/they are an expression of faith and the way of “walking the talk” for the redeemed community.

Personally, I am very thankful for the freedoms we have in America. Even though slowly eroding away, those freedoms (at least right now) are still much better than most other countries in the world. But freedom in America is not cheap. It came with a price, and the freedoms we enjoy today are protected through the boundaries of law-and-order under the umbrella of the Constitution. Let me be clear: **Systemic freedom without boundaries eventually leads to licentiousness and anarchy.** The same is true in understanding our “freedom in Messiah.” We have been set free from the law of sin and death which was nailed to the cross in Yeshua’s blood. And therefore, our freedom in Christ also came with a tremendous cost.

What does this freedom provide? We have freedom to pursue peace with all men (Heb. 12:14) and we have freedom to draw close to G-d (Heb. 7:25; Jam. 4:8). We have freedom to be led by His Spirit into all Truth. We have freedom to keep Torah and follow G-d’s commandments. David said, *“Give me understanding; then I will keep your Torah; I will observe it with all my heart.”* Psalms 119:34 CJB

In the early years of my journey, I was consistently taught that *keeping* Torah as a lifestyle was not a valid way to respond in love to Yeshua. Today, I’ve come to know differently. I have come to know that we can’t come close to Yeshua’s perfection in keeping Torah, but even so, the commandments are very “do-able,” not out of compulsion, but rather in love, out of response to His grace. After all, Yeshua said, *“Don’t think that I have come to abolish the Law [Torah] or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to complete [fill to fullness]. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law [Torah], until all is accomplished”* (Matthew 5:17-18).

Another freedom we have is to imitate our Master and become His bondslaves (Col. 4:12). A “bondslave” is able to choose servitude to his master. We choose servitude to Yeshua. And as we receive the freedoms afforded by Yeshua’s life, death and resurrection, there is a sense of reverence and love as well as tremendous joy and appreciation. We love Him because He first loved us. And in our love for Yeshua, we must understand that love for Him is not just an emotional feeling; it is not merely a theological concept – it is a response through our choices and actions that plays out within the boundaries of Torah (G-d’s Law). That is the true definition of the freedom we have in Messiah.

Other sincere people would object: “But wait! Hold on there bro! There are 613 commandments in the Law – no one can keep all these rules and regulations!” Newsflash: **NOBODY EVER HAS!** Nobody was ever obligated to! Not a single person was ever expected to keep anywhere close to 613 commandments! Why? For a very simple *but often undisclosed* reason. Some of the 613 commandments applied only to women – some to men. Many applied specifically to the priests and their priestly duties. Some applied only to the Tabernacle/Temple and the sacrificial system. Some applied only to the Land of Israel. Already, the (so often quoted) “613” has been whittled down enormously. Furthermore, commandment-keeping was not to be devoid of love for others. Yeshua quoted the Torah commandment in Leviticus 19:18 when He said, *“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”*

So what does G-d have to say about the “do-ability” of the commandments?

*“For this mitzvah which I am giving you today is not too hard for you, it is not beyond your reach. It isn’t in the sky, so that you need to ask, ‘Who will go up into the sky for us, bring it to us and make us hear it, so that we can obey it?’ Likewise, it isn’t beyond the sea, so that you need to ask, ‘Who will cross the sea for us, bring it to us and make us hear it, so that we can obey it?’ On the contrary, the word is very close to you - in your mouth, even in your heart; therefore, **you can do it!**”* (Deuteronomy 30:11-14 CJB)

The Torah and its commandments were lived out perfectly in the life of Yeshua who is the living Word – the living Torah. In imitation and love for Him, we are to do our best to follow Him and the way of life He exemplified to His followers. Since He could not be accused of any violation of

the Torah, we can be assured that He kept the High Holy Days (Moadim/G-d’s Appointed Times) mentioned in Leviticus 23 as did His disciples who followed His teachings.

Let me summarize by saying that love and the Ruach HaKodesh (the Holy Spirit) will guide us into all Truth – I firmly believe this. Given that Yeshua is G-d clothed in human flesh (Phil 2:6-8); given that He pre-existed creation (Col 1:15-16); given that He is “*the same yesterday, today and forever*” (Heb 13:8); given that He said “*If you love Me, you will keep my commandments*” (John 14:15); given that He said “*not a jot or a tittle [a yud or the smallest stroke] will pass from the Law*” [Torah]; given that His inspiration is tied to every “thus saith the Lord” commandment in the Scriptures, we can be confident in living a Torah-lifestyle. The Torah came from G-d through Moshe, and grace and Truth have been realized in it’s greatest expression through Yeshua.

Baruch HaShem!

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